

EVERY PARENT’S NIGHTMARE

REVEALED: THE DISTURBING DETAILS OF NEGLECT AND ABUSE IN OUR NATION’S CRÈCHES



THE COMPLAINTS

- Child left alone in public place after crèche outing.
 - Child found wandering in public area after becoming separated from playgroup.
 - Staff member sacked after child had its hands tied behind its back with sticky tape and put in the corner.
 - Legal proceedings issued and social worker contacted after child was injured and needed hospital treatment.
 - Crèche closed after repeated complaints that children were being slapped.
 - Allegations
- that two toddlers were found in the middle of street opposite pre-school. Children brought back by a passerby.
- Social worker contacted after child received a dislocated arm at crèche and had to be brought to hospital.
- Staff worker sacked after numerous complaints that children were slapped and verbally abused.
- Mother claimed her child was left behind when others went on pre-school outing.
- Five-month-old baby sunburned while at crèche. HSE prioritised the centre for a full inspection.

by Claire O’Sullivan

TWO children were found wandering on a busy street by a passerby after walking out of the front door of their crèche, according to documents obtained the Irish Examiner.

In another incident, a staff member in the North Eastern Area was sacked after a child had its hands taped behind its back and was made to stand in a corner.

The disturbing details of complaints made by parents during 2003 and 2004 were released to The Irish Examiner under the Freedom of Information Act.

They included:

- A child being left alone in a public place after a crèche outing. A staff member in the South-Eastern Area was disciplined and an investigation was launched.
- A child was found alone in a public area after becoming separated from a playgroup. Security at the crèche, also in the South-East, was ungraded after the health board was called in.
- A social worker was con-

tacted after a child received a dislocated arm at a crèche. The child had to be brought to Sligo General Hospital.

- A staff worker in the North-West was sacked after numerous complaints that children were slapped and verbally abused.
- In the South, a mother lodged a formal complaint after a child was left behind while the other children went on a pre-school outing. Inspectors met with the crèche owner after the incident and made a number of unannounced visits.
- A crèche in the South-East was closed after repeated complaints of children being slapped.

All the HSE areas, with the exception of the Midlands, refused to release the names of the crèches where the complaints were upheld, because the felt they the information was commercially sensitive.

Details of more than 300 complaints were released. The most common complaint related to childcare centres not maintaining the adult-to-child ratios set

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With both partners working to meet heavy mortgage payments, parents are more reliant on crèches, and it is important that they should have ready access to information on their standards of care.
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THE MONDAY INSIGHT

down by the HSE under 1996 childcare regulations. Another common concern among parents was that their children were not being properly stimulated or that centres and equipment were substandard.

Under the regulations, there must be one adult to look after every three babies under the age of one, while there must be one supervising adult for every six children aged three and under. Up to eight children aged three to six can be cared for by one adult.

The average weekly cost of childcare is €180.

Every complaint made to the HSE was followed up by a visit to the crèche in question and in many cases led to full inspections. A number of complaints led to social workers being called and staff being let go. At least two complaints led to legal proceedings being initiated by the HSE.

However, childcare legal expert and author Geoffrey Shannon said the findings highlight a lack of proper regulation.

“This country is a vast sea of unlicensed childcare. We need national monitoring of childcare quality,” he said.

“There is no legal requirement for staff to be trained in childcare here. Crèches aren’t registered. They just have to notify the health boards that they’re setting up. Up to now much debate has focused on cost, but ensuring the highest standards from the child’s perspective should be the number one issue,” he added.

The Office of the Minister for Children yesterday said that revised childcare regulations were at a “very advanced stage”.

“The revised regulations will be signed by the minister in the near future and will be published immediately afterwards,” a spokeswoman said.

“The purpose of the review was to establish the aspects of the existing regulations which have worked well and to ensure the services are of a high quality and that the health, safety and welfare needs of the children are met.”

Government’s minimum wage blunder

by Michael O’Farrell
Political Reporter

THE Government department responsible for policing wage rates was yesterday accused of misleading non-nationals by displaying an incorrect figure for the minimum wage on its website.

Published online in 10 languages including Polish, Latvian and Russian, the Department of Enterprise website cites the Irish minimum wage as €7 instead of

the correct €7.65 rate.

The inaccuracies, spotted by Cork Labour TD Kathleen Lynch, are an unfortunate embarrassment for the Government at a time when protection of migrant workers’ rights is to the fore in difficult social partnership talks.

After more than six weeks of impasse, talks on a new national agreement have missed their St Patrick’s Day deadline without even a hint of resolution.

Central to the delay in

agreeing a new partnership deal is the difficulty in agreeing new protection measures for migrant workers — a Government commitment which convinced unions to enter talks.

But the Government’s efforts received an embarrassing setback last week as the latest migrant labour scandal, involving Polish workers at the ESB’s Mon-eypoint power station, erupted.

Outlining the incorrect information yesterday, Ms

Lynch said the least the Government could do to protect vulnerable migrant workers was give the correct information.

“With all the uproar over people being paid below the minimum wage, it beggars belief that the department has committed such an oversight.

“This could mean that we are letting employers off the hook,” she said.

In addition to the basic mistake, translations on the department’s website also

state that the minimum hourly rate for workers under the age of 18 in their first year of employment is €5.60 while the correct figure is €6.12.

Although those in their second year of work are entitled to €6.89 an hour, the website says they should be getting just €6.30.

A spokesperson for Enterprise Micheál Martin said the origin of the errors was unclear but promised that they would be corrected today.

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